

Cabinet – 9 December 2020

Response to report and recommendations of Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Access and Inclusion Working Group.

Portfolio: Councillor Towe, Education and Skills

Related portfolios: Councillor Wilson, Children's Social Care

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

To respond to the recommendations of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Access and Inclusion Working Group report on pupil exclusions.

2. Summary

2.1 At its meeting on 18 June 2019, the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a working group to carry out an examination of the issues affecting access and inclusion to primary and secondary education in Walsall. The Working Group engaged with head teachers of Walsall's primary and secondary schools, officers from the Council's Children's Services Directorate, and with parents/family members of excluded children.

2.2 The Working Group presented its final report and recommendations to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 September 2020 which was then subsequently referred to Cabinet at its meeting on 28 October 2020. Cabinet made the decision to note the report and receive a report responding to the recommendations at the next Cabinet meeting.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That the recommendations of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Access and Inclusion Working Group be approved.

- 3.2 That the actions taken to date to address the recommendations as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report be noted

4. Report detail - know

Context

- 4.1 The Working Group identified the following key areas for review:

- The Local Authority's responsiveness to meeting the demands of parents and schools with reference to the exclusion of pupils from schools in Walsall.
- The effectiveness of the policies and procedures of schools and the Local Authority in relation to the issue of exclusions.
- An assessment of the main reasons for exclusion of children from schools and the practice of 'off-rolling'.

- 4.2 The aim of the review was for the Working Group to provide an insight into these issues and the impact that they are having on children and families and on teachers and school leaders. The Working Group produced a number of recommendations that it is believed would assist in alleviating some of the problems being encountered. These are set out below with responses outlining the work already progressing in some of those areas.

R1. That Walsall Council's local offer to schools should be developed to ensure that more resources are readily available to equip schools to cope better with difficult behaviour from children with special needs.

A working group has been implemented to develop the Local Offer consisting of officers, school staff, parents, children and young people and other partner professionals. This group audited all Local Area SEND inspections and identified local areas that had been identified as having exemplar Local Offers. The group then reviewed all these sites and audited our own local offer against them. The group also reviewed a variety of platforms that are used to host these Local Offers and have designed a new user friendly Local Offer platform for Walsall. The platform has been designed in partnership with parents, children and young people to ensure it holds the content that is needed and is user friendly. The platform is currently being developed and trialled and will go live in January 2021

R2. That Walsall schools and their HR providers should be encouraged to ensure that their policies support the recruitment and retention of high quality members of staff to address most effectively the particular needs of Walsall children.

Training is being developed and rolled out to all schools covering good practice guidance, practice and policy for teacher recruitment

R3. That further guidance and support be given to schools to ensure that when they are dealing with uncooperative parents, the powers available to the schools are fully understood and used effectively and appropriately.

Guidance, advice and support will be provided through the Local Offer as it develops.

R4. That the Fair Access Protocol, which is co-ordinated by the Local Authority but which has to be agreed by and owned by the schools adhering to it, should have a true consultation period.

The Fair Access Protocol, which is co-ordinated by the Local Authority but which has to be agreed by and owned by the schools adhering to it, has had a true consultation period with secondary heads and a draft Fair Access Protocol agreed. This will be fully adopted and implemented by the heads in November 2020.

R5. That via the local offer to Walsall schools, which are able to buy in the service from the Local Authority, support for SENCO and training on autism and anxiety issues should be increased so that both teachers and professionals have a better understanding of Walsall children.

See R1

R6. That the EHCP process should be speeded up as far as is practicable, be made easier to understand, and be more responsive/flexible and accountable to the wishes of parents and carers.

The EHCP process will be speeded up as far as is practicable, made easier to understand, and be more responsive/flexible and accountable to the wishes of parents and carers through the implementation of an online EHCP Hub. This system will be open for all users including parents and carers and will be real time. A working group was established to review a variety of online platforms and consisted of professionals from the authority and schools, and parents and carers.

The working group recommend Open Objects and this was procured.

A project team was established to implement the EHCP hub and ensure it meets the needs of all. The EHCP hub was trailed from June 2020 until November 2021.

From November 2021 all new EHCP assessments will be put directly on to the EHCP hub. All other EHCP will be transferred to the Hub at the point of their annual review. This means all EHCP will be on the HUB by September 2022.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

4. Childrens attendance at school supports achievement of the priority within the

Corporate Plan 2018-2021 that 'Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.' In addition the Council aims to achieve the following outcomes; 'Education, training and skills enable people to fulfil their personal development,' and 'Children thrive emotionally, physically, mentally and feel they are achieving their potential.' The local authority works with a range of educational providers to ensure our children are not excluded, where appropriate, and attend education.

Risk management

4. In supporting the attendance of children at schools, rather than being excluded,
the local authority ensures that it fulfils its statutory obligation to provide suitable education to children of statutory school age. The local authority works to ensure it mitigates the risk of children missing their education entitlement and undertakes regular checks of providers to ensure the education provision is safe and of a good quality.

Financial implications

4. EHCP hub and Local Offer funded through Directorate budget.

Legal implications

4. Any individual contracts (subject to recommendations R1,R2, R5 and R6) will be in a form approved by legal services, as will any variation or extension.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

4. The EHCP hub was procured via Council process and followed due diligence

Property implications

4. No property implications have been identified

Health and wellbeing implications

4. Ensuring access to appropriate educational provision provides every child with the best start in life and enables all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.

Staffing implications

4. There are no HR implications

Reducing Inequalities

4. Ensure access for the most vulnerable learners across the borough to educational provision.

Consultation

4. No formal consultation is required but engagement and dialogue with the Education providers takes place regularly to ensure provision is relevant to the needs of children and young people

5. Decide

Cabinet to approve recommendations and note current developments

6. Respond

Any recommendations made by Cabinet will be actioned through Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7. Review

The recommendations will be reviewed within 6 months through Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background papers

Working Group Report

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20 November 2020

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